SONNETS

from a

LOCK BOX



And Other Poems

by

ANNA
HEMPSTEAD
BRANCH



Author of
'Rose of the Wind'

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And Other Poems

ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH

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ANNA HEMPSTEAD BRANCH



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TO

C. I. MacCOLL

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CONTENTS

SONNETS FROM A LOCK BOX 1

POEMS 41

In the Beginning was the Word 43

Old Woman in the Night 48

A Song from Ganymede 54

To My Black Kitten 58

To a Dog 63

I Think of Him as One who Fights 66

On a Bitter Cold Night 68

MAGIC WOOD 73

THREE STORIES TOLD IN A HAUNTED HOUSE 81

When I Danced with the Great King of Spain 83

This Night — in Paradise 87

What is It that You see — My Lord? 97

IT SPRANG FROM AN ABYSS OF LIGHT 111

Playing My Strange and Lovely Game 113

Wild-Wood Tree 115

Seamless Garment 116

Pattern 117

The Name 118

CONTENTS

Holy City	121
Vicarious	122
Miracle	123
Inheritance	124
Three Days! Three Nights!	125

SONNETS FROM A LOCK BOX

SONNETS FROM A LOCK BOX

I

How nonchalantly I spend with little thrift
His proud sparse earnings which were the frugal pay
Of a man's stout will and honorable day.
What insolent spending of that sturdy gift!
When I reflect on him he seems like one
Who on a bleak hill set a lonely pine.
He saw the North Star in its branches shine.
His honest valors are by me undone.
Why I should own his box I cannot see.
For his scant legacy I am unfit.
Yet since he's in the yard I have his key,
And somehow I am master over it.
I am like one who decks the Holy Tree
With tinsel shapes; then casts it in the pit.

II

I, FROM the clerk, receive my private key,
With curious circumstance and grave parade.
Now my strong box is on the table laid.
There's a stout wall between all folks and me.
The door is locked so that no one shall see.
Here with my fortune I sit down alone —
This glittering skeleton, this golden bone.
With what I do no man can disagree.
And all this pompous opening of locks
And shutting them again that I may look
As if by stealth into a black tin box,
And cut off coupons in a little book!
Here lies my wealth, swathed like a buried king.
From his dead hand I strip the jewelled ring.

III

HERE lieth Personal magic in a box.
All that my father had he left to me.
His ghostly properties defy these locks.
His Will still works, although I lose the key.
If here stood Judge and Jury . . . yet austere, free,
My father's Will, ungovernable, unshaken,
Would point his finger at the Judge — and he
Would say, 'This woman's wealth shall not be taken.'
So in this box I feel it throbbing still,
That living entity, my father's Will.
And I still see, concealed in this black tin,
His pulsing energy that throbs within.
If from this box his Will can rise and save
And lift my body — oh, why not from the grave!

IV

This trivial box seems not the fitting thing
To hide such magic with its black tin lid.
Oh, build it rather like the pyramid
In whose deep crypt is buried some old king;
A crypt adorned with ancient lettering;
Graved with strange shapes and legendary tales
Wherein old riddles spread metallic veils
With many a sacred cross and devil's ring.
Set reasonings here with query and surmise,
And syllogisms from some logician's brain.
Inscribe vague prophecies whose half-closed eyes
Shine like dim jewels set by Tubal-cain.
Carve magic here with iridescence fine
And Runes and Spells and Algebraic Sign.

V

In such a cell with compass and with scale
Some quaint geographer might subtly trap
The oceans and the earth into a map,
Painting the sea and sky with colors pale,
Embellished well with many a quaint design,
The elephant, the bullock and the ape,
The apple, the corn, the winepress and the grape,
The battle axe, the frigate and the mine.
Lo, now, we see the tabulated scheme
Of all the earth; its diagram of story;
But not its mysteries of pain and dream,
Its love, its pride, its passion and its glory.
So Fortunes lie on paper and make no sound,
But with its seasons still the earth turns round.

VI

In such a silence once Hans Glauber bent
All night above his crucible and scales
And with strange formulas dispelled the veils
That are the cloak around the element.
He summoned to his aid an airy power
Compounding essences with measures fine.
With cipher and with cabalistic sign
He crossed the passing of the midnight hour.
At his revolving fire in such a cell
He sought the vapor softer than a petal.
'Azar and Azoth,' cried he, 'hold the spell,
The subtle spirit that lies not in the metal.'
So do great Fortunes curiously hold
The power that turns base metals into gold.

VII

Some old Astrologer might calculate
The movements of the orbs in such a cell —
Ascribing to each star its proper spell
And brooding on its laws, prognosticate.
The great metallic bodies of the night
With magnetisms such as sway and bind
Control great empires and coerce the mind,
Conduct their arbitrations on a height.
Their council chamber is the sky and there
The stars build up their strong immortal towers.
Bearers of unintelligible light
The planets sweep their treasuries through the air.
So through the world magnificently bright
Great Fortunes move with Planetary Powers.

VIII

HERE let Great Fortunes scroll their pedigrees,
Strange armorings of purple and of gold —
The Lion Rampant . . . see, I have been bold! —
The Running Fox . . . I am more swift than these!
How warm with history Great Fortunes are,
How blazonéd with rich heraldic signs,
With emblems of strong cities, ships and mines,
The oil, the corn, and all the pomp of war.
Some bear a crown and some a bloody sword,
Cruelly bright with the cold flash of steel.
Some in their gorgeous quarterings reveal
The penny in the fish-catch of the Lord.
How few they are whose colors shall endure.
How few they are whose blood rides proud and pure.

IX

THERE was a man that lived before the Flood —
He said, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Then
He fled from out God's presence and from men
And the deep earth cried with his brother's blood.
Take heed of him, ye that have bought and sold
And deal in living flesh — lest not in vain
A bitter cry calls down the curse of Cain.
Take heed of him, ye tillers in bright gold.
I say that from these coins go up such cries
Their protestations shall assail the skies.
Where will you hide, you fugitives from God?
... You that are flushed with guilt
Little will it avail that you have built
An opulent city in the Land of Nod.

X

How strange it is that these bright coins should be
Stamped with the Bird of Freedom! They should bear
Dark fierce inscriptions — outcries of despair;
But not the Bird of holiest Liberty.
Upon these national emblems let us see
Some solemn accusation that shall declare,
'Ye serve the rich, the poor ye do not spare,
The Unpaid Toiler has not been set free.'
Carve on these coins the truth. So let us save
A conscience whited by too many lies.
Upon these discs of gold let us engrave
Men's dark biographies . . . make other dies . . .
The crouching figure of the childish slave
But not the Bird that darts into the skies.

XI

What dreams burn here, never to be revealed?
What visions of what archangelic things!
As many lives in this rich gold lie sealed
As in great tombs lie buried ancient kings.
Pick! Pick! Last night I heard the solemn spade
With clocklike sound and unremitting toil
Dig its slow sense of time into the soil.
The box was lowered. The pious parson prayed.
Blow, Gabriel, on thy trumpet! With that sound
Sing up men's bodies to a glorious morn.
Men's souls sleep here. Where is that godlike horn
Shall call them up out of this glittering ground?
Out from this cruel earth, so bright, so cold,
Live things spring not from its unliving mold.

XII

Inscribe in austere characters this screed.
'As in a golden urn here lies the dust
Of a poor boy whose dreams were so august
He might have changed the earth' . . . all you, take heed!
You fond and foolish traffickers in greed
And spend not rashly what you hold in trust.
For you are unwise stewards and unjust,
That bartering childhood achieve wealth indeed.
In this bright coin shining like the sun
His passion glows and his brief visions burn.
But what the great deeds are he might have done
Are secrets that we shall not ever learn.
I take this coin in my hand as one
Lifts priceless ashes in a funeral urn.

XIII

Am I a prisoner? What have I done? . . .
What is this silence and this heavy door?
Suppose 'tis bolted and I go out no more?
I sweat all over and I seem like one
Hid in a dungeon by some cruel king.
There is an evil in this atmosphere.
Here is the sudden thrust of swordlike fear.
The air seems full of subtle reasoning.
What web of craft here weaves its rich design!
With sighs of men forgotten! What prayers are these!
Some whispering of things strange and malign
Masters my will with cruel images!
Now fierce magnetic energies constrain
My flesh to shake and all but freeze my brain.

XIV

What witchlike spell weaves here its deep design,
And sells its pattern to the ignorant buyer.
Oh lacelike cruelty with stitches fine —
Which stings the flesh with its sharp mesh of fire.
God of the Thief and Patron of the Liar,
I think that it is best not to inquire
Upon whose wheel was spun this mortal thread;
What dyed this curious robe so rich a red;
With shivering hues it is embroiderèd.
With changing colors like unsteady eyes.
I think the filigree is Medea's wreath.
Oh, treacherous splendor! In this lustrous prize
Of gold and silver weaving, madness lies.
Who purchases this garment — Sire — buys death.

XV

How many a priest with many an anxious prayer
Has bade us worship in what devious ways;
Some with rich ceremonials of praise,
And some with mighty rituals of despair.
They have cried before the Pleiads and the Bear,
The Moon that rules the night, the Sun the days.
A fiercer God has seized me by the hair.
I was that savage they could never tame —
The Bull, the Snake, the Ibis and Ibex —
I have preferred a wilder holier name
And bring my queries to the sacred X.
So do Great Fortunes bow their heads and muse
Whether the Sign will give it or refuse.

XVI

Upon the walls of this enchanted cell
Let there be graved admonitory themes,
Hermetic doctrines and the antique schemes
Of old theologies. Here let there dwell
The Lords of Market Places. Here let us spell
Legends of purchase in lettering that streams
With blood of gods . . . and here inscribe the dreams
Of the Masters of Exchange and Heaven and Hell.
God bought the world and for it gave His Son.
Among the stars the great transaction's done.
The Jews preferred Barabbas and they paid
The Son of God by whom all things were made.
In mighty symbols let these walls rehearse
The legend of the Silver and the Purse.

XVII

Oh, carve these coins with words like golden fruit,
The lustrous apples of Hesperides;
Magical words as from a spirit lute
Heard from enchanted islands over seas.
From out the silent coins what sounds are these?
It is the music of words being fitly spoken
As apples that the smiling gods have broken
From the rich boughs of Paradisal trees.
Engrave them deep with signs of silver fret
Letters of silver their sweet sounds enfold.
Oh pluck the lovely syllables and set
In baskets of silver shining apples of gold.
Leave letters in a circle round and round
Like apple seeds buried in golden dust.
The fruit thereof shall be both sweet and sound,
Dropped from the singing tree — 'In God we trust.'

XVIII

Snatch from the orbed sun and its spheral dwelling
Upon the metal where the sign is set,
The Auroral breathing and its primal spelling,
The burning letters of the alphabet.
Beware the magic of the Talking Sage.
Beware the fiery rune that he has written
With his sharp stylus on the golden page.
Beware the metal that the word has smitten.
See how the coin, in its lettering,
Wears shape forever — the circle and the Sign.
Beware the Presence of the Bread and Wine.
This money is a sacramental thing.
It is the Word, it is the magic spell
That gives these coins powers of Heaven and Hell.

XIX

Oh, carve this coin with the Golden Snake
Which flashes round the earth with glittering scale.
In writhing circles of the Zodiac
It leaves among the stars its brazen trail.
Now gliding through our earthly almanac
In sinuous weaving and with lustres pale;
And now around a coin in circling track
The Ancient Serpent swalloweth its tail.
In wreaths of splendor and with jewelled eyes
It drags its glittering belly on the ground.
Tear not its metals from the dust — that prize
Bears in its fangs a poison too profound —
But seek the brazen serpent lifted up,
Whence healing pours as from a magic cup.

XX

Now I perceive that I no more belong
To this wan world of passionate pale things.
For my sharp sense has heard a wilder song —
The silent music Holy Logic sings.
Earth was not proud enough for me — but now
Here is a Godlike splendor — here is pride —
Here is the silent shining of the brow
Of the Great Lover whereto I am bride.
Now through my reason and my sense break through
The fearful magnetisms of the Lord
And He is not like gently falling dew
Who has the fierceness of the sharp-edged sword.
Now through my mind breaks forth new sky — new
earth —
Here is fresh splendor . . . and a virgin birth.

XXI

What is there in the supersensuous flesh
Which is the angry self of my proud brain
That it desires the sharp cruel rein
And the thin whip of logic? Let it thresh
For good and all out of its impure mesh
The truth — renew the quick magnetic pain
Of the invisible scourge — Then once again
The God shall drive in anguish clean and fresh
Around transparent rock my steed-like will
Up steep invisible crags, built of pure air,
And you shall hear a music shrill and rare,
My crystal feet straight up the glassy hill!
While I create the rocks up which I run
Or sink in chaos like some burnt out sun.

XXII

I USED to think . . . Number was fixed and still,
Rigid as marble, like an altar cast
In rocklike splendor. Now I perceive at last
Its changing modes of supernatural will.
Now I perceive wild garments floating free.
I hear the planetary music crashing.
Great chorals sway with Bacchic energy.
The churchly cycles move, their mild eyes flashing.

So number within number shines and sings
And with interior energy doth beget
The godlike shapes of many an alphabet,
Bodied in air, with their deep patternings.
Their magnetisms create my flesh anew.
Great Festivals like goddesses advancing —
I know full well if I abide in you
I shall feast well and shall be saved by dancing.

XXIII

Behold the stars that sweet as silver lyres
Are played upon by gods . . . while planets move
In rhythmic patterns to the music of Love
Dancing high rituals round religious fires,
So business wreaths with business and they twine
Garlands of wealth, industrial patterns weave
In changing rhythms round the earth; they leave
Wheels within wheels in intricate design.
In jewelled arabesques and serpentine
They dance revolving lustres and they make
The glittering convolutions of the snake
On sinuous wreathing of the Living Vine,
So do bright coins swept in Uranian trance
Still keep on earth the old sidereal dance.

XXIV

I KNEEL with bowed head at the sacred shrine —
Adorned with invisible loveliness ornate.
No eye may gaze upon the priest-like state
Of that mysterious energy — the Line.
Upon the plate I see its symbols shine —
The circle and the X — but where it goes
Or in its lustral office what it does
No man observes the vigil and the sign.
Now what new orb, into the darkness cast,
Receives from it the circle round and round
Or from what azure zenith has it cast
Its staves of starry music to the ground.
No eye observes its introspective trance
The splendor of its procreative dance.

XXV

Into the void behold my shuddering flight,
Plunging straight forward through unhuman space,
My wild hair backward blown and my white face
Set like a wedge of ice. My chattering teeth
Cut like sharp knives my swiftly freezing breath.
Perched upon straightness I seek a wilder zone.
My Flying Self — on this black steed alone —
Drives out to God or else to utter death.

Beware straight lines which do subdue man's pride!
'Tis on a broomstick that great witches ride.
Wild, dangerous and holy are the runes
Which shift the whirling atoms with their tunes.
Oh like a witch accursed shall she be burned
Who having flown on straightness has returned.

XXVI

Around this rod my writhing self might twist —
And fold the splendor of its poisoned mesh,
Its spangled scales of gold and amethyst,
The brilliant convolutions of the flesh.
Not yet my sinuous coil from the ground
Can lift its lust — save by this one escape.
This fearful straightness I may wreathe around
As close as binds the skin upon the grape.
Now upward springs the fierce determined power,
And its sharp brightness shoots my sensuous nerves.
With godlike speed in this unearthly hour
I break in splendor all my glittering curves.
Now by this straightness, I lay hold on God
Who in His Town set up His Holy Rod.

XXVII

On what new coin does the Golden Ring
Settle in splendor as on the glittering rod
Which is the invisible finger of the god?
What priestly rite presents the sacred thing?
I hear the stellar harmonies of stocks
With churchly music climb up and down the scales.
The wedding hour is struck by golden clocks.
The Bride approaches in her silvery veils.
Now moves the Line with ceremonials high
With geometric passion and with pride!
Now with sidereal splendor in the sky
The Ancient Lover honoreth the Bride;
And moving with Godlike power from afar
Confers the Ring upon the Lesser Star.

XXVIII

HERE is the Harp of stars which was so strong
It shook the air and earth with godlike dreams.
Heroes in mirth assembled to its themes.
Its bright strings glittered with the fires of song.
Then richly every planetary stone
With number shone as if with bronze or gilt
For Number is the god's invisible throne.
With music struck from gold Great Thebes was built.
Since music moves and governeth all things
Let us reflect before the golden lyre.
Here lies the will that in its coined strings
Confoundeth Kings and altereth desire.
Here stretched in pain along the broken wire
The God still breathes creative numberings.

XXIX

Now let the God of signs and circles break
The crystal boxes of arithmetic.
And out of magic emblems let him make
His ancient puzzles with his scratching stick.
Think not these coins are material things.
Their metal cloak is folded round the God
Whose flesh is music and whose glittering rod
Ruleth the earth with his strict numberings.
Beware the presence of the Power with Wings,
The Guardian of increase and of birth.
Who sitteth on the circle of the earth,
Is perched in splendor on these starry rings,
And like a chariot they still do bear
The Arithmetic God upon the air.

XXX

In such a cell one time a monk did set
In an old missal many a lovely shape
Of crimson roses and the purple grape
And golden apples in a silver net.

He wreathed such splendors with the alphabet
The mellow pages shone with pure delight.
Here heavenly trumpets blew with holy might
Such lovely sound as no one can forget.

Each flaming word on its high errand sprang.
'Silver and gold,' they choired every one —
'Silver and gold' . . . like sweet birds in a tree.
'Silver and gold' the fiery letters sang . . .

'Silver and gold,' said Peter, 'have I none —
But what I have that do I give to Thee.'

XXXI

I SAY that words are men and when we spell
In alphabets we deal with living things;
With feet and thighs and breasts, fierce heads, strong
wings;
Maternal Powers, great Bridals, Heaven and Hell.
There is a menace in the tales we tell.
From out the throne from which all language springs
Voices proceed and fires and thunderings.
Oh when we speak, Great God, let us speak well.
Beware of shapes, beware of letterings,
For in them lies such magic as alters dream,
Shakes cities down and moves the inward scheme.
Beware the magic of the coin that sings.
These coins are graved with supernatural powers
And magic wills that are more strong than ours.

XXXII

THERE were Three Shepherds once. They did espy
A brightly shining Coin in the sky,
And, being Jews, they said, 'Let's look around!
There may be Lucky Pennies in the ground;
And since the law falls sharper than an axe,
Collect — and so be ready for the tax.'
Thus did they journey anxiously to find
The Buried Treasure with an eager mind.
When, lo — the Penny shone with magic light
And in a woman's bosom nestled bright,
Engraved with deeds of gods and stellar glories,
With twelve great signs and old sidereal stories.
So in a manger dark as any purse
They found the God who is the Universe.

XXXIII

See how the nebula like bullion lies
In shining heaps upon the cavern floor.
Shaping his discs of gold and silver ore,
The god of metals shapes Uranian dies.
What rich mysterious bales of merchandize,
Are stretched upon the counters of the air!
What gods of Trade and Produce gather there
And spin bright coins with calculating eyes.
What mighty contracts signed in Heaven and Hell
The mathematic god with flashing pen
Inscribes in light; what deep exchanges when
The great magnetic Priesthood buy and sell.
While back of all celestial barter still
The Laboring Man strives up the starry Hill.

XXXIV

WHEREAS; the shining symbol of Exchange
Stretched on the altar of the Market Place
Glitters in splendor like the Golden Fleece;
Whereas; forsaken by the gods, with strange
Wild speech of foreign traders all around,
The fierce wild war of the excited street,
It shineth still with dewdrops fresh and sweet —
Its warm wool trampled in the bloody ground;
Whereas; the Priests of Trade with scheming eyes
Conduct strange rituals of blood and fire,
It seems strange, somehow, while with fierce desire
They scatter burning flesh for sacrifice,
No prophet cries. . . . 'Here lies the Ancient Pain.
This is the Lamb that from the beginning was Slain.'

XXXV

Before this silent altar let us look
Where ancient scriptures gleam on polished skin
Like an old parchment yellow worn and thin,
Richly illumined. This is the Golden Book,
This is the page where starry annals dwell,
The colored legends of old pedigrees,
And magic numbers and ancestral spell
With jewelled veins and blood-red arteries.
This Book was riven from the Lamb once slain!
How sensitive, with what a living Light
These Legends burn so luminously bright,
Transmuted flesh of labor and of pain.
Upon those metal pages be engraved
Names — and the golden Legend of the saved.

XXXVI

THERE was a doctor once — an eccentric man
I should imagine — as all men aver.
He was in his day a skilful bonesetter.
He in his heart conceived a mighty plan:
'It is equation tells us what to do,
The Unknown quantity shall still prevail.
I will enquire of measure and of scale
And mutter algebras the whole night through.'
Says he, 'I'll make a golden skeleton
Clothed in men's flesh . . . from many an ancient
bone . . .
And all the glittering coins that shine and run
And caper in men's pockets shall be One.
And they shall shine as beautiful and still
As stars reflected in a crystal hill.
The Tree of Life towers tall and lovely. How
Shall he be cursed that breaks the golden bough!'
But they who love not wholeness still divide
The seamless garment when the Lord has died.

XXXVII

I LAY upon my knees the Funeral Box
Wherein a god lies dead as glittering stone.
His pulse is still — here lies his golden bone,
Dust unto dust! — but yet he breaks the locks.
His living speech is mute as filigree.
Weighted with silver now his clappered tongue
From which the sweetest strains of music sprung
And shaped the world with music wild and free.
In twisted wire wreaths his curling hair.
Swathed in stiff metal his helpless body lies,
When suddenly the Splendor is not there.
He casts the golden coins from his eyes
And fills with colors all the April air.
'Ye shall be lifted up if I arise.'

XXXVIII

Oh carve it like the Astrolabe and set
With planetary symbols the golden stone;
With measurings of days and nights the zone . . .
With patternings of gold and silver fret.
Make beautiful the magic amulet.
Richly engrave with astronomic sign
The spinning circle; with sidereal line,
The Zodiac and stellar alphabet.

So money, in the rim of the world, swings round.
It measures earth and sea and mountains high.
It steers the ship, translates the starry sky.
It multiplies, divides and makes no sound.
It measures the seasons and we see it bring
Apples of gold and festivals in Spring.

POEMS

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

It took me ten days
To read the Bible through.
Then I saw what I saw,
And I knew what I knew.

I would rise before the dawn,
When the stars were in the sky;
I would go and read the Book,
Till the sun rode high.

In the silence of the noon,
I would read with a will.
I was one who had climbed
To an high, burning hill.

At dusk I fell asleep
With my head on the page.
Then I woke — then I read —
Till it seemed like an age.

For a great wind blows
Through Ezekiel and John,
They are all one flesh
That the Spirit blows upon.

And suddenly the words
Seemed to quicken and to shine;
They glowed like the bread,
They purpled like the wine.

Like bread that had been wheat
In a thousand ample plains,
Sown and harvested by men
From the suns — from the rains.

Like wine that had been grapes
In a thousand vineyards strong —
That was trampled by men's feet
With a shout, with a song.

Like the Bread, like the Wine,
That we eat with one accord —
The body and the blood
Of the supper of the Lord.

And the wine may be old
And the wine may be new —
But it all is the Lord's —
And I knew what I knew.

For a great wind blows
Through Ezekiel and John,
They are all one flesh
That the Spirit blows upon.

And a letter is a power,
And a name is a rune —
And an alphabet, my friends,
Is a strange and ancient tune.

And each letter is a throne
From which fearful splendors stream —
I could see them flash like fire
With an arch-angelic gleam.

And within each word a city
Shone more far than eye could reach —
Where the people shone like stars
With a great new speech.

And each city was an angel,
And they sang with one accord —
Crying, 'Holy, holy, holy,'
In the presence of the Lord.

The Book felt like flesh,
It would breathe — it would sing —
It would throb beneath my hand
Like a breast, like a wing.

It would cry, it would groan,
It would shout and complain —
It would seem to climb a hill
With its solemn stress of pain.

It would grapple with fierce powers,
With a deep interior strife.
It would seem to heave and lift
With a terrible, glad life.

And my flesh was in the Book,
And its blood was in me;
I could feel it throb within,
As plain as it could be

I was filled with its powers,
And I cried all alone,
'The Lord is in the tomb,
And my body is the stone.'

I was anguished, I was dumb,
When the powers began to move,
That shall stir the aching ground,
That shall shake the earth with love.

Then my flesh, which was the stone,
Felt the hills begin to lift.
The seas shook and heaved,
And the stars began to shift.

And the words rushed on
And each letter was a throne.
They swept through my flesh,
Through my brain, through my bone,

With a great, fearful rush,
I felt it clean through.
Oh, I saw what I saw,
And I knew what I knew.

And I swung one side
When the ghostly power began.
Then the Book stood up —
And I saw it was a Man.

For a great wind blows
Through Ezekiel and John.
They are all one flesh
That the Spirit blows upon.

It took me ten days
To read the Bible through —
Then I saw what I saw,
And I knew what I knew.

OLD WOMAN IN THE NIGHT

An old woman in the night
Hears a lad sobbing.
What shall I do then
To comfort poor Robin?

All I might say to you
You'll not be heeding.
Out of my Book of Life
You'll not be reading.

This is the saddest
Of old people's grieving:
We tell them and tell them
But they won't be believing.

Awake in the dead of night . . .
You and I only!
Where's the old nursery light?
My! . . . Folks are lonely!

What life has done to you,
I'm comprehending.
From the great wounds of nature, lad,
There's no defending.

This house was left to me.
We call it ours.
Yet in the dark it seems
Filled with strange powers.

Only one room away
Over the doorsill,
I hear a boy's will
Break against life's will.

Once I would fly to you,
Sleeping or waking.
Now I am presiding
At your heart's breaking.

Now that my body
Is food no longer,
I think that my will, somehow,
Is growing stronger.

I seem like earth now,
Teeming, delicious.
I'm past my bearing time
Yet still I'm nutritious.

Once the whole earth seemed
To rest in my body . . .
There slept the ample grain,
Water and apple tree,
Smiling and ruddy.

I am in earth now —
I pulse in its body —
Alive in the ample grain,
Water and apple tree,
Smiling and ruddy.

Still I shall come to you.
Nothing deflects me.
Through the night coverts
No one suspects me.

Through rocks and through roots,
Through sky and stars now;
You will not know it
When I lay a hand on your brow.

When the herd leaves the field
They follow no master.
It's the old she-goat
That leads to new pasture.

Not the old bearded ram —
Not the young mother —
No, she would always
Swing her will to the tether.

Who knows where grass is sweet,
The brook in the hollow?
Where the old she-goat leads,
The herd always follow.

I fold like the air
Round your sobbing and cursing.
And the wounds that you bear
Are part of my nursing.

You'd rather heed the wind
Than what I am saying.
It's little a lad cares
For an old woman's praying.

Hush! In the dark he thinks
He's all alone there.
He mustn't hear me move!
It wouldn't be playing fair.

I always knew what to do
When a small child was grieving.
There are things one can say to them
And a child's so believing.

But he is a man now...
Living or dying
There's no sound so terrible
As a man's crying.

Heavy his sobs are,
Like the earth shaking.
What can a woman do
When a rock's breaking?

Still it's a woman's way
When a man's needing
To think in her homely way
Of warming and feeding.

Many's the time
I've made hot gingerbread.
Food's always comforting
Though nothing is said.

I will get up at dawn,
I will slip down the stair.
When you come down, my lad,
Home will be right there.

The earth may turn all awry
When you're not looking.
But there's one job that lies straight —
An old woman's cooking.

I'll set the table fresh.
I'll fill the bubbling pot.
I'll make buckwheat cakes.
I'll have the coffee hot.

When I awaken him
Red will his cheek be.
Almost a child he will seem,
Much as he used to be.

See the warm sullen curve
Of his round cheek there.
I'll never let him know
He laid his heart bare.

Time to be getting up!
Wake up — my laddie.
Time to get off to work.
Breakfast is ready!

A SONG FROM GANYMEDE

I WAS a lonely shepherd —
Speaking a simple word.
Long hours in Delian meadows
Leading my quiet herd.

One day I lay in slumber
Dreaming in deep repose
How Luria would bind me
With violet and rose.

Lost in the sunlit pasture
Warm in the grass, lay I —
When suddenly Jove's eagle
Plunged on me from the sky.

With his strong claws he seized me —
I heard his grating cries —
Fiercely in their sockets
Burned his harsh red eyes.

Proud as a hero's helmet
Was his stern, hard wing.
The sharp spear of Achilles
Was a gentler thing.

By the hot wounds that tore me,
By his harsh piercing cry
I knew the Jovian Eagle
Was warring up the sky.

From out the little farmhouse
I saw my mother run;
I saw her pale face staring
Straight at the cruel sun.

Far in the lowly pastures
Where the gray herds feed —
I heard the young lads calling
'Where is Ganymede?'

And when we clove the hill-tops
And still drove fiercely on
I heard a girl's shrill voice
Cry 'Ganymede is gone!'

I fought God's bird in anguish.
Blood stained our blazing track.
I writhed from out his talons,
I sprang upon his back.

Above I saw Olympus —
Tower beautiful and bright.
The Gods' immortal laughter
Surged round me in the night.

'On! On!' I cried; 'My War-Bird!
My proud steed of the sky!
Drive hard or I will scourge you!
Strike upward or you die.'

Not plucked and not a captive!
I cried a royal word.
I rode in pride to Heaven
Upon the Jovian Bird.

Between his wings triumphant
Full splendidly I rode.
And through Olympian gateways
A conqueror I strode.

With deep immortal laughter
The high Gods called us home.
I heard a great glad voice
Cry, 'Ganymede has come!'

I seized the goblet graven
With many a mystic shape.
And well ye know — O Heroes —
My blood was in the grape.

'Take, Jove' — I cried — 'this flagon
And drink the healthy wine.
Enrich your godlike splendor
With the passion that was mine.'

'Drink, then, — O proud Olympian —
The blood I shed for thee.
The wine that breeds immortals
Is our mortality.'

TO MY BLACK KITTEN

I

To you who vex me while I write
And at my pen do gently bite,
To you I will this verse indite.

It seems to me when I am dead
And centuries passed above my head

That I myself might think in trees
And sculpture nature's majesties
Carved in rock and changing seas.
I could conceive of all of these,
One of those angels that rehearse
Their dramas in the universe;
Whose moods are days and whose great hands
Embodied are in seas and lands.

Yes, I could be without a doubt
One of those angels that greatly shout
Planning tall hills and sunsets out.
But only God's Mother getting to sleep
The Eternal Babe would think to make
A little foolish thing like you!
Such are the things that mothers do.

Sometimes when in angelic skies
The great antiphonals arise
Of Archangelic melodies,
I'll say, 'On earth and far away
Those are hills that last a day.'

And when with glorious battle shout
They shake great Heaven inside out,
I'll say, 'On earth and very far
That cry turns to a falling star.'
But when through praises, prayers and pities
I hear the rhymes of ancient ditties,
Nursery songs to please God's Son,
In Heaven the very littlest one,
Then will I say, 'Those are the kitties.'
In you a sign to us is given
To show that there is fun in Heaven.

II

Before Abraham was 'I am'
Upon the knees of His great Dam
Pretended that He was a Lamb,
And she would call Him 'Little Lamb.'
No sooner were they made than they
Straightway did begin to play,
While playing still His innocent game
How innocent to earth He came.
Him — playing still the Lamb of God —

They caught and bruised with many a rod
And killed Him for His lovely game.

Then earth did heave, the sky did rock
And Heaven itself received the shock.

He who loves not innocent play
He cannot breathe on Judgment Day.

For earth will not be saved at last
Through cataclysms strange and vast
But by exquisite deep games,
Salvation just by changing names.
Mary to Jehovah will disclose
The funny things that Jesus does.

And tall archangels hear those things
And rustle their amused great wings.

When God comes in His great state
The foolish shall confound the great.

As darling children charm away
All that is less sweet than they,
We'll be saved by God's sweet play.

And earth shall come to an end at last
With laughter rich and warm and vast.

III

To you who vex me while I write
And at my pen do gently bite,
To you I will this verse indite.

All through my flesh and through and through
The Holy Child enjoys you too.

I laugh at Him and He to me
Enraptured with your Infancy.

My heart knows well that you and He
Gamboled together at God's knee.

God Himself has not refused
To be exquisitely amused.

He loved you for your lovely fur
And listens closely for your purr.

Yes, Heaven is exquisite with fun —
The laughter of the Three-in-One

When they behold the Heavenly Boy
Playing games of childish joy;

Playing He is a Happy Door
With welcome for the weak and poor.

Playing He is a Loaf of Bread
By which the frail are comforted.

Playing He is the Living Tree
Danced around by you and me!

All through my flesh — yes through and through
The Holy Child enjoys you too.

TO A DOG

I

If there is no God for thee
Then there is no God for me,

If He sees not when you share
With the poor your frugal fare,

Does not see you at a grave,
Every instinct bred to save,

As if you were the only one
Believing in a resurrection;

When you wait, as lovers do,
Watching till your friend comes true;

Does not reverence when you take
Angry words for love's sweet sake;

If his eye does not approve
All your faith and pain and love;

If the heart of justice fail
And is for you of no avail;

If there is no Heaven for thee
Then there is no Heaven for me.

II

If the Lord they tell us of
Died for men yet loves not love;

If from out His Paradise
He shuts the innocent and wise,

The gay, obedient, simple, good,
The docile ones of friendly mood,

Those who die to save a friend
Heavenly faithful to the end;

If there is no cross for thee
Then there is no cross for me

III

If its boughs reach not so high
That they pierce through cloud and sky,

If its roots are not so sound
That they stab the heavy ground,

If it thrills not through all Nature
Plunged through every living creature,

If its leaves do not enmesh
Every bit of groaning flesh,

If it strike not its mighty spur
Through fang and claw and tooth and fur,

Grappling with rock and earth and stone,
Then indeed I stand alone.

Nothing less than this can save
Me, from out my fleshly grave.

Me, in whom such jungles are
Where the beasts go out to war.

If there is no God for thee
Then there is no God for me.

I THINK OF HIM AS ONE WHO FIGHTS

You think of him as one who fails.
I think of him as one who fights;
Who goes on strange adventurous ways
Through tortured days and dangerous nights.

You know him by the fallen flesh,
The cruel trap where he was caught.
I know him by the lifted brow
And by the Cause for which he fought.

For he went first and he went far
With glorious banner lifted high,
And you and I have different ways
Of judging him until we die.

For if he wins or if he falls
I know 'tis written in God's laws
That he who fights on the right side
Shall wear the splendor of the Cause.

You know him by the grievous wound
And by the earth on which he lies.
I know him by the patient mouth
And the deep sadness of his eyes.

You know him by the hostile mood
Which was the devil's battle shout.
I judge him by his quest for God,
And by the things he prays about.

And you shall have your place of pride,
With lifted banners glittering bright;
But the whole earth shall hear him speak
Of One who raised him in the night.

And you shall stay in Heaven, perchance!
With righteous souls that do not err!
But he shall come to earth again
And comfort with the Comforter.

You think of him as one who fails.
I think of him as one who fights;
Who goes on strange adventurous ways
Through tortured days and dangerous nights.

ON A BITTER COLD NIGHT

On a bitter cold night
When the peakèd stars shone pale,
I saw on high, a kiss,
Ride against the gale.

It was small, it was fierce,
It was all wreathed with flame,
Like a Paradisal child
With a wild, holy name.

Like an archangelic child,
No bigger than a blossom,
That an angel great and mild
Might nourish in her bosom.

It flew through the skies,
It darted through the trees.
The cattle saw it come
And they crouched on their knees.

It flew through the storm,
Through the thunder and the fire.
It throbbed along the stone,
It pulsed through the mire.

The folks looked up,
With all the wits they had.
A man went blind
And a woman went mad.

A young lad saw it
And he blushed like a rose.
He burned with its fire,
And he tore off his clothes.

He gave his clothes away
To the beggar on the street.
Oh he burned like a rose
From his head to his feet.

What he ought to do
The parson couldn't tell.
So he rang, rang, rang
The meeting-house bell.

A hunter raised his gun.
He thought it was a bird,
With its flame-colored dyes
And its sweet new word.

He was sick for its feathers,
For if he had it dead
He could take it to the market
And barter it for bread.

But it sped straight on.
It darted with a will.
It whirled through the stars
And it shook a great hill.

It shone on the seas
With a strange fearful light.
It swayed not to left.
It swerved not to right.

It drove through the sun.
It clove through the moon.
And the stars all danced
To a great new tune.

It was blue above the steeple
And white above the foam
And it whirled blood red
Through the Court-House dome.

It was small, it was soft,
It shone without a sound.
It rent the iron frost
In the black cold ground.

It burst through the wall.
It leaped through the stone.
There in a sullen cell
Lay a prisoner all alone.

He groaned and he cried.
He struggled and he wept.
Like thorns in his side
Were the hours that he slept.

It flew into his hand
And there it lay and smiled
Like a little quivering light,
Like an archangelic child.

Then it crept to his lips
And there it seemed to cling,
Like thirst that would be quenched
From a deep eternal spring.

It flew to the heart
Of a woman lone and wild.
It nestled in her bosom —
No bigger than a blossom,
But yet it was a child.

It could breathe, it could burn.
It could sing like a bird.
It could feed like bread,
And create like a word.

It covered up the skies
With its great warm wing.
The turrets and the steeples
And the domes began to sing.

It folded up the earth
With its warm sweet breast.
All things shone
And all things were at rest.

The Angels saw it shine
With its countenance of flame.
They threw off their crowns
For 'Holy' was its Name.

The earth blossomed sweet
With exquisite desire.
The Kiss turned to a city
Like a rose all on fire.

While in the Gospel Tent
The Preacher rose and cried,
'Behold the Marriage Supper
Of the Son and the Bride.'

Then the people all rose up
And they sang with one accord,
'It's the great Marriage Supper,
It's the great Marriage Supper,
It's the great Marriage Supper of the Lord.'

MAGIC WOOD

MAGIC WOOD!

Magic Wood! Magic Wood!
Through the woods I came!
There I found the Playing Man
And it was a game.

'*I will be the Queen*,' you said,
'*In a gown of green*.'
'Very well, my Dear,' said I,
'You shall be the Queen.'

Patty was your golden shoe,
Anne, your bright green gown —
Adelaide the treasure chest
Where you kept your crown.

Peter was the rock outside,
Making quiet shade.
I could not see the Playing Man,
He was the Game we played.

'*You shall be the child*,' you said,
'*And your feet are bare.*
You'll be lost in the great woods!
And please have golden hair.'

'Please to want your mother, too,
Crying in the night!
Then you'll see my tall tower
And my shiny light!'

'Very well, my Dear,' said I —
'I will weep indeed,
Crying, "Mother" all night long!
And my feet will bleed.'

'Come to my door,' you said
'I will let you in.
I will say "You're wet and cold.
Where have you been?"

'I will lead you in with me
To my jewelled chair.
I will mend your ragged dress
And comb your golden hair.

'I will hold you in my arms,
I will call you Dear.
I will be the Mother Queen —
Nobody to fear!

'I will give you bread and milk
And sing a song to you.
Go to sleep as soft as silk!
That's what I'll do.'

Arvia was the song you sang,
Getting me to sleep!
Betty was the jewelled chair
Cushioned soft and deep.

Sally was the golden crown,
Curiously made.
I could not see the Playing Man,
He was the Game we played.

'*I will be the Queen*,' you said,
'*In a gown of green*.'
'Very well, my Dear,' said I,
'You shall be the Queen.'

'*You shall be the child*,' you said,
'*Oh, so small and mild!*'
'Very well, my Dear,' said I,
'I will be the child.'

'*I will teach you how to read*
In a magic Book.
It will make you laugh to see
How the letters look.'

Richard was the letter A,
Jack was the B.
All the letters laughed like children
Dancing round a tree.

'When you've learned the lovely letters
And their curious ways,
Then I'll let you read the stories
Turning them to Plays.

'They're all about a Playing Man.
He played the loveliest games.
He could make folks change about
Just by calling names.

'He could make-believe so hard
He could really be.
He could be the road to town,
Or an apple tree.

'He could be the very book
Where the letters are.
He could be a little child,
He could be a star.

'Anything at all he could!
He's the tower Door.
Once he was a loaf of bread
And gave it to the poor.

'If we play the stories hard,
Right — straight — through —
Perhaps we'll see the Playing Man!
He may be playing, too.

'*I will be the Queen*,' you said,
'*In a gown of green.*'
'Very well,' said I, 'my Dear —
You shall be the Queen.'

'*But the least thing that I say*
You must quickly do.
If you do it just that way
I'll be your mother, too.'

'I will do it just that way —
Child of spells and charms!'
So you cried, '*Run to me then* —
To my very arms.'

To your arms I ran, my Dear,
And you seemed so wise!
'*Look at me, my child*,' you said,
'*Look into my eyes.*'

So I looked into your eyes.
God! . . . What did I see?
All the Motherhood of Heaven
Round my infancy!

What a deep angelic mirth
Smiled out of your face!
Yet how mild, serene you were,
Of abundant grace.

All the powers of Heaven streamed
From your Sovereign breast.
There I lay and seemed to feed . . .
Oh, what lovely rest!

Far — far — had I come!
Long, long, had I striven!
Oh — 'tis such a silly thing
That keeps silly folks from Heaven.

'*Rock-a-bye — Hush-a-bye!*
Was the forest deep?
Arvia is the song I sing,
Getting you to sleep.

'*Rock-a-bye! Hush-a-bye!*
I've a lovely plan.
When you wake we'll play a game
With the Playing Man.

'*I will be a Tall Town —*
Stately as a Queen —
The Playing Man shall be a Tree
In my garden green.

'*You shall be the child,*' you said,
'*Oh, so small and mild.*'
'Very well, my Dear,' said I,
'I will be the child.'

THREE STORIES TOLD IN A HAUNTED HOUSE

WHEN I DANCED WITH THE GREAT KING OF SPAIN

She hadn't any fire and she hadn't any bed,
She hadn't any cupboard and she hadn't any bread,
She hadn't any table and she hadn't any chair.
She hadn't any comb for her thin gray hair.
She hadn't any cloak so she had to stay in.
She hadn't any flour and she hadn't any bin.
She hadn't any petticoat — 'twas all worn out.
She scrubbed up the floor with its last old clout.
She was old, she was cold, she was bent, she was poor.
If the weather kept on she would have to burn the door.
Oh, but she was hungry! She gnawed at a stone.
She snapped at the moonlight like a hard white bone.
The wind pawed and growled and worried it around
And buried it at last in the frozen black ground.
She hadn't any neighbor — she hadn't any news —
She hadn't any coverlet — she hadn't any shoes.
But when she grew so cold she was numb above her knees,
When the tears froze in her eyes, and she knew she would freeze,
When the moon on the wall hung its tapestries of white
In a chamber richly pale decked with ornaments of light;

When the moon on the floor in a strange mosaic
shone
Like silver richly graved in a cold white stone;
When a ceremonial splendor left a spell upon the air
And a pageant swept and glittered down an alabaster
stair;
When a banquet table carved with shining shapes
Blossomed with pomegranates and pale gold grapes —
Bread of elfin filigree, silver carved like capon,
Diamonds and emeralds set in the venison;
When the icicles that hung all around the open door
Were all lighted up so they flashed in the air
With a keen unearthly flare like a great chandelier;
When the wind ceased to whine and made a lovely
sound —
Music in the air, music in the ground —
Music all around, quaint, curiously thin —
Like a far-away flute and an ancient violin
In an old proud dance.... Then the haggard old
crone
Crept from her straw and stood up alone.
She hopped and she lurched across the icy floor,
She stumbled to the closet, she opened the door,
She took down a dress — it bristled with gold! —
Silver in the pattern, silver in the fold —
Beautiful with colors of a dark moth's wing —
Woven as with music. You could almost hear it
sing.
She put the dress on, and she stood up so fine,

With a strange unearthly glitter in the moon shine.
The dress spread around in splendor on the stone
Where the pale moonlight in a strange mosaic shone
And just for an instant with a gay light cry
It seemed as if a revel in the air swept by.
And a gold cloaked monarch stepped from off his throne —
Jewels in his shoes, jewels in his crown —
With his hand on his heart he bowed way down.

Suddenly a voice was lifted up high
And the old crone spoke with a shrill fantastic cry.
'I haven't any fire and I haven't any bed,
I haven't any cupboard and I haven't any bread.
I haven't any plate and I haven't any cup.
I haven't any crutch. It's been burned up!
I haven't any dish, I haven't any kettle.
I've no place to sit for I haven't any settle.
I haven't any petticoat! It's all worn out.
I scrubbed up the floor with its last old clout.
And if I have a name it's one I cannot find.
The name my mother gave me has gone from my mind.
When I am dead the folks will all be laughing!
It's on a board I'll lie — for there won't be any coffin,
And when I'm in the yard and am nothing but a bone
There'll be no word of God carved for me on any stone.'

Then she stretched out her arms — she raised her
arms high —
And she lifted all alone a harsh triumphant cry —
Like the fierce proud music of an old heroic strain
When a wild horse dies on a solitary plain.
'I haven't any fire and I'm old, old, old!
But I have the silver gown embroidered with gold —
Jewels in the pattern — jewels in the fold —
That I wore — when I danced — with the great King
of Spain.'

THIS NIGHT — IN PARADISE

Where have you been? What have you seen?
What is it you have done?
What is the strange and mighty thing
That you have looked upon?

The sign was set — the crowing cock —
And we are comrades three.
The trusty skipper pledged his word
To sail you out to sea.

Your brow is wet with sweat and blood!
Your pistol's gone — your eye
Is calm with an exalted light —
But yet at noon you die.

You might have lived your life out, lad,
And led your pack of men.
You that were thief to twenty towns
Shall never steal again.

My friends — I heard the crowing cock.
Now I must die at noon.
But what it was I did last night
I could not leave undone.

My friends — I saw your shining sail
When I rode up the hill —
And over against, the Northern Star
With its strange hypnotic will.

I said, 'I've three hours more to ride
Ere I set sail from shore,
And by the Northern Star I know
I have one errand more.'

I killed one man in Southern Woods,
Sank one in Western Weir;
Dragged one East to Pauper's Yard
With never a decent tear.

And two of them were cruel thieves —
False men — it served them well.
The other was a gentle lad
And what the reason that I had
I cannot ever tell.

But now the North Star walked alone
With its fierce hypnotic eye.
It shone like a polished pistol held
In the black glove of the sky.

'Perhaps three murdered men ride North
For one last fight with me.
There is some menace in the air,
Some spell — some mystery.'

'There's something left for me to do.
By that unearthly fire,
I seem to feel a binding spell
An aching deep desire.'

Ghosts do not carry pistols, lads,
And if they fought with Hell —
Why I had hate and I had wrath,
And I could match them well.

But if they fought the better, lads,
And I should die that night —
Then I should fall in Northern Woods
Out in the full moon's light.

Then North and South and East and West
We would like brothers lie
And you would have four murdered men
To box your compass by.

I rode an hour North, through woods,
A road I did not know.
The moonlight lay on leaf and tree
Like an ethereal snow.

Deep in a forest glade I saw
A house all glittering bright
Its pillars and its roof seemed carved
Of pale unearthly light.

The hemlock trees in silver dressed
Sagged heavy on the ground.
The moss grew thick around the steps
And the deep grass grew round.

A holy splendor in the grass
Lay like a bridal veil —
It seemed a house deserted long
In a forgotten tale.

From solemn treasuries of light
From ornaments in grass and tree
I could have filched you wreaths of glass
And garlands of bright filigree.

I could have gathered apples of gold
Set in caskets of crystalline.
I could have brought you great white pearls
And chrysoprase and emeralds green.

'No! No!' I cried, 'Ye treasures bright,
I should go mad if this should be!
I will let no goblin light
With silver fire master me.

'No! No!' I cried, 'Ye jewels frail,
Ye garlands of light filigree!
I have been thief to twenty towns
But never thief to Faery.

'And three Dead Men ride North to-night
And they will test me well.
Though not with pistols will they fight
But with the powers of Hell.'

I gripped my pistol by the butt,
I struck the heavy door.
I flung it wide and moonlight lay
In silence on the floor.

Heavy the great door opened wide
In that chill house alone.
I breathed a strange and ancient air
Of twenty years agone.

There was some strange majestic power
That drew me up the stair.
No pistol, lads, could help me now,
Nor yet — I think — a prayer.

Friends, when I climbed that stair I knew
My fateful hour was on.
Yet what it was I did last night
I could not leave undone.

Ghosts do not carry pistols, lads,
And if they fought with powers of Hell,
Why I had hate, and I had wrath,
And I could match them well.

I opened wide the stout barred door,
And what therein did see?
Oh, there was pomp and there was pride
And solemn revelry.

The chamber seemed all built of light.
The bed — it seemed a throne.
And wrapped in satin mantle white
A Lady lay alone.

And I could hardly bear the sight,
Such loveliness was there.
For I beheld a Lady dead
Upon a snow-white bier.

A cushion made of velvet white
Was laid beneath her head.
With silver lily and with rose
It was embroiderèd.

She lay all richly swathed around
In satin lily white.
Her braided hair in coils crowned
A brow supremely bright.

Her small hands folded on her breast,
So exquisite and still,
Seemed like the North Star charged with life
And supernatural will.

A great white pearl lay on her breast,
A circlet on her brow.
And I could see she once was proud
For she lay proudly now.

'Oh, who has left this Lady Bright
That I find lying here —
Alone in this great House at night
And not a neighbor near!

'Where is her Mother? Where is her nurse?
What watchman on the lawn?
Is there no kinsman who could guard
Her loveliness till dawn!

'A burial yard is close at hand.
Perhaps they brought her here
From some far town to an old home
That leaves not any heir.

'Soon the black hearse with four tall plumes
Will bear her from the door.
Soon shall the sexton scatter dust
And she return no more.

'Does no one watch, does no one care —
What evil men might do?
The cock may crow, the ship may sail,
I'll watch to-night with you.'

Oh, she was lovely! Lovely — lads!
And like a child at play.
Such brightness and such awe profound
Might be on Judgment Day.

I seemed to be a child, my lads,
Upon my Mother's knee.
And there I listened to her songs
From ancient minstrelsy.

Tales — Tales she told! Oh she told tales
Of elfin wonder bright.
And well I knew — yet did not know,
How wise I grew that night.

Stately she was yet wrapped around
With music elfin gay,
Like some young maid in garlands crowned
Decked for the Queen of May.

I had looked on death three times, my lads,
With its harsh rasping cry.
And men had groaned and men had cursed
And this it was to die.

Swollen throats and angry eyes
And harsh and bitter breath!
But now I knew what life might be
Seeing that this was death.

Seeing that this strange thing was death
And yet — how it was birth.
How charged with will, with lovely powers
Of immemorial mirth.

Oh, lovely! lovely was she, lads!
In innocent revelry!
It was as if a snow-white ship
Sailed stately out to sea.

And while I gazed I seemed to see
A strange, a lovely thing.
A blossoming tree shone in the air
With the fresh powers of Spring.

And Spring itself like a harp of gold
With many a glistening string,
Where music with soft plumes did move
And with the kiss of death and love
Like happy birds did sing.

I said — 'I have one hour to ride
Before I sail away.
If I am not there by crow of cock
I'm hanged at noon to-day.

'But though I am a treacherous man
I have one thing left to do.
And I — my Lady and my Queen —
Choose one hour's faith with you.'

And now, lads, since I die at noon,
It seems not death to me.
But as if in some great snow-white ship
I sailed out on the sea;
With elfin music blowing round
And spirit revelry —
And a Lady for a Figurehead
In glistening white and rosy red, —
A Lady — raised up from the dead —
Oh, a Great Lady she!

Bury me in the Northern Woods
While the full moon still is on.
Lads, what it was I did last night
I could not leave undone.

And I shall get up I think — sometime,
When the great Spring Powers move,
Because of the hour I spent with her
And faith and pain and love.

For in that hour I watched with Her —
Gay, beautiful, and free —
Three ghosts of murdered men shone out
Like blossoms in a tree.

They did not fight with pistols, lads,
Nor by the powers of Hell.
But by the grace of Paradise
They fought exceeding well.

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU SEE — MY LORD?

'What have you to say to us, my Lady of Northumberland?'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington — I've nothing else to say.'
'Oh, yes, you have — my Lady — and we think we shall be hearing it
And you'll be glad to tell it, before the end of day.'

'At what hour did it happen — my Lady of Northumberland?'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington — nothing has happened here.'
'Oh, yes, there has, my Lady — 'twas at three o'clock it happened.'
'I often rise at three o'clock and have for many a year.'

'Why do you rise so early?'
'It is an ancient custom,
'Twas at that hour I used to rise to nurse my crying child.'
'And still you walk in sleep, Lady?'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington,
An old maternal tenderness by which I am beguiled.'

'And still you rock the cradle on the stone before the altar?'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington, why do you harass me?'
'We think we have a message to send our Duke in Ireland —
When deeds are done at three o'clock he'd better come and see.

'There is an ancient office — it's in the common Prayer Book.
You had best kneel down and read it — "We do beseech Thee, Lord,
From envy and from malice and from hard hearts, deliver us —
From pride and from false doctrine and from hatred of Thy word."'

'Go get your Book, my Lady!'
'I haven't any Book, Sirs.
When Law is written in the heart there's little need to pray.'
'You have no Book, my Lady? There was once a superstition
That every Christian Lady used a Prayer Book every day.'

'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington — I've lost my Book' —

'You lost it?'
'And deeply I regret it.'
'But if it should be found
By what token might we know it?'
'It is bound in purple velvet,
With a cross of pearls upon it and with sapphire set around.'

'There are others just as costly — my Lady of Northumberland.'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington, pray, what have you to do
With the tokens in my Prayer Book?'
'Why, as honest Christian gentlemen,
It is only if we find it, that the book belongs to you.'

'Look for the wedding service, my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington,
My sister's hand emblazoned it, oh, every letter shone.
"Here's my heart's promise to obey," she said, "upon my wedding day,
When you, my Dear, give me away, upon the altar stone."'

'What would you give to have it back, my Lady of Northumberland?
It's worth its weight in gold, we think.'
'I'd give my wedding ring.'

'Your Lord, being dead, would blush for shame.'
'That isn't so, good gentlemen.
He's been in Paradise too long to care for such a thing.'

'What colors did your sister use, O Lady of Northumberland?'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington, pray, what is this to you?'
'A further sign to know it by, my Lady of Northumberland.'
'She did the letters all in rose, in gilt, in tender blue.'

'Is this your Prayer Book, maybe — my Lady of Northumberland?
'Tis bound in purple velvet, with pearls all set around.'
'Good gentlemen, I thank you — '
'We are your servants, Lady.
'Twas buried beneath the altar stone, half covered in the ground.'

'Why have you grown so pallid, my Lady of Northumberland?'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington — I am not well to-day.'
'You would better call your sister.'
'Nay gentlemen — she's sleeping.
I bade her take an extra rest upon her wedding day.'

'Why is your hand stained red, Lady? Madam, are you wounded?'
'There's blood upon this book, Sirs!'
'Is there some secret here?
You would better call your sister.'
'I said, Sir, she is sleeping.'
'Aye, sleeping sound and sleeping well and laid upon her bier.'

'You play some cruel trick, I think, my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington.
Her bridal gown all waiting lies — this is her wedding day.'
'Oh, well you know, my Lady, that at three o'clock this morning
You killed her on the altar stone when she knelt down to pray.'

'We've something now for you to do — my Lady of Northumberland,
Although to bend your will to ours is bitter hard for you.'
'I'll never bend my will to yours, my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington!'
'Oh, yes, you will, my Lady, and be glad to bend it, too.

'Go call your page, my Lady.'
'I will not call my page, Sirs.'

'Oh, yes, you will — my Lady — with all your cruel pride.'
'I have called my page already, at three o'clock this morning!
I saddled the horse with my own hand on which the lad should ride.'

'Then call another, Lady, for you must send a message,
And say, "I killed my sister, who went alone to pray."'
'I sent the message, Gentlemen, and so cannot obey you!
My Lord will be here at the door about this hour today.'

'Can no one break your pride, Lady?'
'Not you, I think — good gentlemen!
I said, "I killed my sister who went to pray alone,
At three o'clock this morning. Ride fast, my Lord of Winchester!
Oh, scourge your horse and slay me, Sir, upon the altar stone."'

'Now we will break your pride, Lady, we'll break your cruel pride, Lady!
And you shall learn your lesson yet and thankfully obey.'

'That is a word I'll never speak — my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington —
Save to my Lord of Winchester upon our wedding day —

'What words are these you dare to speak — O Lady of Northumberland?
Even now about your brow accursed the deathly powers move.'
'You are too ignorant and low, my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington,
To comprehend the red hot roads, the strange wild roads of love.'

'Your speech is cursed and you are damned, O Lady of Northumberland.
Yours is an evil will, we think. A foul deed has been done.'
'Before the hour is gone, my Lords, I wed the Duke of Winchester.
There'll be a bridal yet to-day, upon the altar stone.'

'Now we will break your pride, Lady, we'll break your cruel pride, Lady!
If you would live until he comes, the whip shall tutor you.
'Tis better far that you should say to God upon your Judgment Day,
That at the end you did one thing you did not wish to do.'

'If that's the way I earn my right to greet my lord, good gentlemen,
I bend before you willingly. You have no need to urge.
To feel his sword thrust through my breast were sweet as any bridal wreath.
And I will earn that prize, my Lords, although 'tis by the scourge.'

'Now we will break your pride, Lady! We'll break your cruel pride, Lady!
You may leap and you may run, but we will tame you still.'
'I break for no one but my Love — my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington.'
'Yet you shall learn from us, we think, the cleavage of your will.'

'Bend low before us, Lady! O Lady of Northumberland!
Bend low before us, Lady and crouch upon the ground.
The whip has something here to do, and you, before we are through with you,
Shall run and cringe and whimper too, like any bleeding hound.'

'Oh, gladly, gladly, do I bend, my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington.

But not as one who kneels to you — but of my own
desire.
For now at last ere I am dead, behold I am anointed
With that for which I have prayed so long, pain's
quick consuming fire.

'Oh, fierce has been my cruel pride — my Lords of
Fyfe and Wyvington.
And I have lain upon my bed in pools of bitter
sweat,
For I could scarcely speak or move for strict con-
straining of my love.
Now I shall be set free — set free! — And God shall
ease me yet.

'Break me from out this cruel rack, my Lords of Fyfe
and Wyvington.
Oh, cut me loose with bleeding whips and send me
free and wild.
Oh, drive me forth from my disguise — so I may smile
into love's eyes.
Then I can run to meet my Lord as if I were his child.

'Scourge me and scourge me yet again — my Lords
of Fyfe and Wyvington.
I never yet had faith in God — but I believe him
now —
Seeing how at last he answers prayer! 'Tis by his will
that you are here.

But never think I bend to you, though I am bending now.

'The whip you lift to shame me — Sirs — is lashed with powers of all the stars!
Oh, make me cringe and make me run and scourge me yet again!
For I am one who deals with God, my Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington —
And men shall never break my pride — I do not deal with men.'

(*Enter Duke of Winchester*)

'What's this, my Lords?'
'Why, justice — Sir!'
'My Lords of Fyfe and Wyvington,
What is this wild and bleeding shape that fawns upon my knee?'
''Tis she whose pride is broken, Sire. The Lady of Northumberland
Who slew your bride at break of day, has learned humility.'

'Stand up, and look me in the eyes — O Lady of Northumberland.'
'Oh, that I do — my Lord — my Love — to whom I yield alone.
My Lord, I give myself to you. Do with me as you choose to do.

Oh, lift your sword and slay me, Sir, upon the altar stone.'

'You'll not be saved by me, Lady, O Lady of Northumberland.
I have no wish to break your pride or quench your cruel fire,
I know you long to feel my will — I give it not, through flesh and steel,
But if you go to meet your God, go by your own desire.'

''Tis not your will in flesh nor steel — I want — my Lord of Winchester.
There's something else, among the stars, upon a strange wild height.
Some distant focus of your will, like the strong moon above a hill
That lifts and drags the silvery tide and holds it bound with light.

'Who best can hold her husband's will, is wife, my Lord of Winchester.
I know what 'tis you wish of me who somehow am your bride.
More deep than love, more deep than hate, I know full well you are my mate.
There'll be a wedding yet, to-day — and I'll stand up in pride.

'Give me your sword! — How beautiful! It shines —
my Lord of Winchester!
We need no hymn, we need no priest, we need no
festal mood.
Here's my heart's promise to obey, my Lord, upon
our wedding day.
Her painted words of gilt and rose I stain for you with
blood.

'But there is something that shall live — forever —
Lord of Winchester.
A tender infancy of Love — a creature wild and bright.
Ere I am damned in Hell and lost, the powers of my
creative ghost
Shall bear your child and cast him out laughing into
the night.'

. . . . . .

'What is it that your staring eye perceives, O Lord
of Winchester?
It is not bent upon the ground — 'tis not her corpse
you see!' —
'Why, no — there is a little child flits through the
air, good gentlemen —
No bigger than a petal cast from off a wild rose tree.'

'Why is it that you raise your cloak, so gently, Lord
of Winchester?
'Tis not the cold corpse on the ground that you would
shelter so' —

'Why, no, it is a little child that I would comfort,
gentlemen.
It runs to me with cries of Love. I cannot let it go.'

'What are you holding to your breast, we pray you,
Lord of Winchester?
And what is it you see — my Lord — beyond our
mortal sight!'
'Good Gentlemen — be still, I pray — A child was
born to me to-day —
A child of deep immortal Love and innocent delight.'

IT SPRANG FROM AN ABYSS OF LIGHT

PLAYING MY STRANGE AND LOVELY GAME

I RAN into the early dew
To breathe the break of day,
And all at once was made so new
That I began to play.

But first, I wept — it shone so bright!
It almost seemed to sing.
It sprang from an abyss of light
An innocent wild thing.

And richly did it feed my soul
With sustenance of flame.
It burned like archangelic bread
And to the feast I came.

Oh, purple light! Oh, golden sheen!
More white than fiery snow!
It sweetly burned and smiled at me
And would not let me go.

All other things I did forget
Save how to laugh and run.
I thought I had a shining shape,
A daughter of the sun.

Into the bosom of my Lord,
With eagerness I flew —
Playing my strange and lovely game,
The innocence of the dew.

I cried as happy children cry
Into a father's ear,
For the lover of all playing things
Is ever quick to hear.

And in the presence of the Lord
All innocent play comes true.
I knew he would rejoice to see
My frolic in the dew.

He showed me how to weave a crown
Of exquisite desire,
Blossomed and leaved with living flame
And garlandings of fire.

He plucked me apples of the sun
From off a golden bough,
Then left a wreath of laughing light
Around my happy brow.

WILD-WOOD TREE

I HAVE no beauty, oh, my Love,
Save what is given by Thee,
Save only when Thy loving eyes
See loveliness in me.

I do not wear it every day
As other women do.
It is a light — it will not stay —
It only comes for You.

Yet I would rather have it so,
A secret thing untamed,
Than have it trapped by alien eyes
Or be too lightly named.

Love, when the sweetness of your love
Beholds a grace in me,
It is as if a golden dove
Lit in a wild-wood tree.

SEAMLESS GARMENT

Say not, with such as do delight in lies,
That this love is religious — or this, profane.
Say only that the God with august eyes
Is cognizant of beauty and of pain.
Within our undivided sky is set
The Zodiac, with planetary powers.
Oh, sunder not our starry alphabet
With all the godlike meanings that are ours;
But rather, with its austere script, translate
Our human entities into such glories
As are the deeds of gods in mighty stories —
And change ourselves to a more starry state.

Since we may have, according to our wish,
The pattern of our choice — let us not tear
The seamless garment, nor rend the crystal bars.
Oh, cry not out upon the Shining Fish —
Say not, 'This is the Scorpion, this the Bear' —
But say 'Here is the god among the stars.'

PATTERN

Now in this crystal mountain I divine
A spiritual, a more interior thing.
It is the love of Shapes — whose patterning
Retreats — appears, and through each other shine
With nuptial energies of curve and line.
The stars embrace in ecstasies of flower —
With godlike passion, with mathematic power —
The hieroglyph, the alphabetic sign.

Now let the cosmic love of gods be claimed.
Here is the sacred festival whereby
A marriage weds a marriage in the sky
With ceremonials no priest has named.
The Lord's own body brighter than the sun
Makes one the two who each is three in one.

THE NAME

When I come back from secret dreams
In gardens deep and fair,
How very curious it seems —
This mortal name I bear.

By this quaint name I make their bread
And trim the household light,
And sun the linen for the bed
And lock the door at night.

I wonder who Myself may be
And whence it was I came,
Before the Church had laid on me
This frail and earthly name.

My Sponsors spoke unto the Lord
And three things promised they —
Upon my soul with one accord
Their easy vows did lay.

My ancient Spirit heard them not.
I think it was not there.
But in a place I had forgot
It drank a starrier air.

Yes, in a silent place and deep
There did it dance and run,
And sometimes it lay down to sleep
Or sprang into the sun.

The priest saw not my aureole shine,
My sweet wings saw not he.
He graved me with a solemn sign
And laid a name on me.

By this name do I stitch and mend,
The Daughter of my Home.
By this name do I save and spend
And when they call I come.

But oh, that Name — that other Name —
More secret and more mine!
It burns as does the midmost flame
Before the midmost shrine.

Before my soul to earth was brought
Into God's heart it came.
God wrote a meaning in my thought
And gave to me a Name.

By this Name do I ride the air,
And dance from star to star,
And I behold all things are fair
For I see them as they are.

I plunge into the deepest seas,
In flames I laughing burn.
In roseate clouds I take my ease
Nor to the earth return.

It is my beauteous Name, my own,
That I have never heard.
God keeps it for Himself alone —
That strange and lovely word.

God keeps it for Himself — but yet
He speaks through you — and so
By that Name you are calling me
And unto you I go.

By this Name do I sing and breathe
A fresh mysterious air.
By this I innocently wreathe
New garlands for my hair.

By this Name do I answer 'Yes' —
Word beautiful and true.
By this I sew the bridal dress
I shall put on for You.

HOLY CITY

And you will see a basin there,
Pure and clean and very white,
Lifted wings on either side
Holding it with gentlest might.

And those lifted wings shall be
Beautiful, like shining stone;
And the water in that basin
Like a Queen upon a Throne.

Underneath, the twisted shape
Of a man shall hold it up,
Half an angel, half an ape,
Struggling for the chasted cup.

And you will never know at all
I turned myself to this —
The laboring shape, the lifted cup,
The water's healing kiss.

VICARIOUS

When I was a growing child
My Mother, kind and ever mild,
Sat me down before a table
And bought such food as she was able,
Saying, 'Eat now, precious lamb.
You need food, for this we came.'
From her little store of wealth
She drew forth as if by stealth,
A silver dollar, and saw me eat
What she purchased, bread and meat.
Small the portion on her plate.
She was fed by what I ate.
I looked up and in her eyes
Saw profound contentment rise.
My childish heart observed that she
Feasted well in watching me.

MIRACLE

ANYTHING might happen now
Since at last you are my friend!
Heaven might flash from out the sun
And the earth come to an end.

When I saw that it was so
I ran out to watch the sky.
If I paused to feel or know
God's great moment might go by.

For I thought, 'The Lord has come
Blessing all the world again,
Riding in a golden cloud
With His troops of Shining Men.'

INHERITANCE

They left to me their house and lands
Who am the next of kin.
On what was theirs I lay my hands
And freely I go in.

Before the hearth where they once sat
I speak my yes and no.
I am the master over it
Who once would come and go.

I would repeat the bitter sting
Of all my early need,
Yes, I would own not anything
But have Them here indeed.

I would resign my years of right
If I could hear them say;
'We cannot let you go to-night'
Or, 'Come and spend the day.

Now this estate lies broad and fair
As far as eye can see.
But not a voice breaks on the air
And no one speaks to me.

THREE DAYS! THREE NIGHTS!

THREE days — three nights — with wondering ear
A spiritual voice I heard.
It caroled sweet, it caroled clear,
A strange unearthly Word.

Oh, solemn mirth! Oh, laughter deep!
It seemed a voice in my own breast.
Three days — three nights — it broke my sleep
And triumphed without any rest.

Passionate utterance! Speech divine!
It talked! It murmured! All night long
That mystic tenderness spoke on,
And pierced me with its Heavenly song.

Three days — three nights — I heard it sing,
The voice of that Interior Dove.
'Twas Love itself embraced my heart
And broke its own for very Love.

It seemed Myself — but yet it seemed
Another creature more divine.
Oh, bubbling rapture! Hidden spring!
Mysterious mirth more deep than mine.

THREE DAYS! THREE NIGHTS!

Three days! Three nights! With wondering ear
That spiritual voice I heard.
I knew it was my Lord who sent
Into my heart His Love's own Bird.

I slept, I waked in tenderest peace,
Three days — three nights — it failed me never.
Love's very Self in music spoke
I thought that it would sing forever.

. . . . . .

Never again! No, never again
Has that sweet Bird returned to me.
But I am sealed unto the Lord
Knowing such things can be.

THE END

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